

CORRESPONDENCE

Letters to the Editor

How Do I Get a Paper Accepted? Concerns of a Junior Researcher

I read with great interest the recent Editor's Pages presenting issues that the editors of *JACC* have found to be of importance in the preparation of a manuscript (1,2). As a junior research fellow, I found all of these recommendations particularly useful and I wish I knew all of these back when I wrote my first manuscript. By coincidence, that manuscript was initially submitted for publication to *JACC* and was rejected. Although it was finally published in another journal, I always felt that it could have gone higher if I had better guidance during both the planning and the execution of the project as well as during the writing of the manuscript.

What I find particularly confusing is that publishing a paper nowadays in a high impact factor journal requires increasingly sophisticated and complex statistical analysis. I believe that if one performed a literature search over the last 15 to 20 years focusing only on the paragraph that is dedicated to statistical analysis, one would find that this section of the manuscript is consistently expanding and that new methods are constantly emerging. But how far can this trend go? Should clinicians also be statisticians to be able to have a paper accepted or to read and understand a paper? And are complex statistics always telling the truth? Unfortunately, we all tend to chase the "significant" p value, although this does not necessarily reflect the scientific importance in our manuscripts. However, it is a common truth that one can publish more easily significant rather than nonsignificant probability values.

Another issue that one should have in mind when writing (or reading) a paper should be honesty. Trying to publish by all means can sometimes result in "biased" data. I believe that honesty and scientific integrity are essential values for clinicians and researchers. Nevertheless, these cannot be measured by impact factors or citations and cannot be made to stand out in curriculum vitae. Therefore, I fear that there is a real danger of a gradual devaluation of the principle of honesty in scientific publishing.

I believe that the answer to all of these concerns should be a new-found appreciation of the virtue of truth in science.

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Reply

I would like to thank Dr. Karamitsos for his letter and interest in my Editor's Page articles "How to Get a Manuscript Published" (1,2). Dr. Karamitsos seems to indicate that I had failed to mention the importance of honesty in preparing scientific articles. Honesty is, of course, the basis of everything we do in medicine and is assumed. My sense is that bias that leads to erroneous research is usually detected after, if not before, publication. Although the need to publish or perish is strong, I do not share your suspicion that dishonesty is prevalent in medical investigation. In any event, the peer review system is probably the best way currently available to handle it.

I believe that greater attention to statistics has resulted in a marked reduction of erroneous publications. We have 2 statisticians as Associate Editors who review every manuscript before publication. In the process, they protect us from accepting papers that are flawed. Statistics are imperfect and can obscure as well as enlighten; certainly, statistical significance pales compared with biological significance. However, in my view, the emphasis on statistical methods in medical research in recent years has resulted in a substantial increase in quality. Although I am not a statistical expert myself, I know where to find one.

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